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CONSERVATION DISTRICT DIRECTOR ELECTIONS

House Bill 5194 as introduced
First Analysis (12-16-03)

Sponsor: Rep. Dale Sheltrown
Committee: Conservation and Outdoor
Recreation

THE APPARENT PROBLEM:

The soil conservation districts in the state date back to the 1930's with the enactment of Public Act 294 of 1937, the Soil Conservation District Law. Now codified as Part 93 of the Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act, the soil conservation district law has as its stated purpose "to conserve the natural resources of this state, control floods, prevent impairment of dams and reservoirs, assist in maintaining the navigability of rivers and harbors, preserve wildlife, protect the tax base, protect public lands, and protect and promote the health, safety, and general welfare of the people of this state" (MCL 324.9302). Today, there are 82 soil conservation districts throughout the state (roughly divided along county lines), with the power and authority to conduct research relating to conservation of farmland and natural resources, conduct demonstration projects on conservation methods, carry out erosion control and prevention measures, and develop comprehensive plans for the conservation of farmland or natural resources, among a laundry list of other duties.

Conservation districts are administered by a board of five directors, elected at the annual meeting of the conservation district. The act provides that residents of the district who are unable to attend the annual meeting of the district may cast a ballot for district directors by absentee ballot at the office of the conservation district. It is believed, that in order to increase the opportunity of voters to vote for conservation district directors, voters should be allowed to cast an absentee ballot sent through the mail.

THE CONTENT OF THE BILL:

The bill would amend Part 93 (Soil Conservation District) of the Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act to allow absentee voters to vote for conservation district directors by mail any time after official notice of the annual meeting (where the

actual vote for district director occurs), and prior to the annual meeting.

MCL 324.9307

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS:

The House Fiscal Agency notes that the bill would have no fiscal impact on the state. The HFA further notes that local governments would be required to cover the costs of printing, distributing, and mailing the ballots. (12-9-03)

ARGUMENTS:

For:

Allowing voters to cast a ballot for conservation district directors through the mail is an easy way to increase turnout in these elections. As with other elections, personal obligations and inclement weather can seriously depress voter turnout even for those who are aware that the election is taking place. In other cases, voters, particularly the elderly, may find it rather burdensome to have to attend the meeting or drive to the conservation district office to vote in the election.

POSITIONS:

The Department of Agriculture indicated that it supports the bill. (12-10-03)

The Michigan United Conservation Clubs (MUCC) indicated that it supports the bill. (12-10-03)

The Michigan Farm Bureau indicated that it supports the bill. (12-10-03)

Analyst: M. Wolf

■This analysis was prepared by nonpartisan House staff for use by House members in their deliberations, and does not constitute an official statement of legislative intent.

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